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Met Office to play key role in flood forecasting

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The Met Office, in partnership with the Environment Agency, is to play a key role in flood forecasting following the establishment of a Flood Forecasting Centre for England and Wales.

Weather prediction forms a crucial part of flood risk management; the ability to predict severe weather, days in advance, provides a first indication of possible coastal, river and surface water flooding events.

The Flood Forecasting Centre is one of a number of improvements announced today by Secretary of State for the Environment, Hilary Benn in response to the Pitt Report into the summer floods of 2007.

The Met Office will also receive an additional £500,000 to continue work on improving the computer modelling used to forecast heavy and localised rainfall.

Enhanced prediction methods, which have been delivered ahead of schedule since the events of 2007, have already shown improvements in forecasting localised weather events. However, there is still much research and development to be done in this innovative area of meteorology and this funding will further this work. The amount of supercomputing capacity available is also critical in providing local scale, probabilistic forecasts of intense rainfall.

The Met Office and the Environment Agency have been working closely together for many years and the floods of 2007 showed that an even more integrated approach to flood forecasting and warning was needed.

The key operational role to be played by the Met Office in issuing flood alerts affirms comments by Sir Michael Pitt in his review of the 2007 floods that weather prediction forms a crucial part of flood-risk management and acknowledged the Met Office's status as a world leader in forecasting.

Following the floods of 2007, the Met Office and the Environment Agency have successfully worked together to deliver alerts of potential surface water flooding across England and Wales. In Cornwall, fire crews were able to act quickly to save people from swollen rivers and, in Chester, the NHS Trust was better prepared for increases in A&E admissions when bad weather struck.

Delivering improvements in flood forecasting will be critical as the impacts of climate change take hold in the UK. Research from the Met Office Hadley Centre has shown that extreme weather events are likely to become more common, leading to an increased risk of both summer and winter floods.

Welcoming the formation of the centre, John Hirst, Met Office Chief Executive, said: “The Met Office is looking forward to an even closer working relationship with the Environment Agency and is uniquely placed to use our world-leading climate change science and weather forecasting expertise to help tackle the issues around all types of flooding.”

Under-secretary of State for Defence, Kevan Jones, said: “The Met Office is rightly renowned for its work in weather forecasting and climate prediction and has been working tirelessly since the floods of 2007 to bring forward planned developments in capability.

“Combining Met Office and Environment Agency expertise means that those of us that live in areas prone to flooding will be better prepared and warned.”